

One Size Fits All? Explaining U.S.-born and Immigrant Women's Employment across 12 Ethnic Groups

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Leading explanations for ethnic disparities in U.S. women's employment derive largely from research on men. Although recent case studies of newer immigrant groups suggest that these explanations may be less applicable than previously believed, no study to date has assessed this question systematically. Using 2000 Census data, this study tests the relative merit of existing explanations for women in 12 ethnic groups. To this end, we disaggregate Hispanic, Asian and Middle Eastern women by country of origin and examine patterns by nativity. The results show that human capital and nativity are important for all groups, but these factors explain the employment gap with whites for Hispanic women much more than for Asian and Middle Eastern women, especially immigrants. Additionally, standard models are more useful for understanding variations in employment among Middle Eastern, Japanese and Hispanic women than for explaining differences among whites and other Asian subgroups. These findings indicate the need for newer concepts and measures to capture the increasing heterogeneity in U.S. ethnic women's employment patterns. We conclude by suggesting possible avenues for future research that expand on models of men's employment to include factors unique to women.

Over the past three decades, scholarship on female labor force participation has evolved from exclusive attention to white women's economic activity toward a greater recognition of ethnic diversity among U.S. women (Acker 1973; Browne 1999; Dill 1974; Stier and Tienda 1992). This evolution first resulted in comparisons between large racial/ethnic categories, such as whites, blacks, Hispanics and Asians (Tienda and Glass 1985; Wong and Hirschman 1983). More recently, research is addressing diversity within these groups by national origin and nativity (Cohen 2002; England, Garcia-Beaulieu and Ross 2004; Kahn and Whittington 1996). Asian Americans, for example, derive from at least six major groups of ethnic origin, and their socio-economic incorporation in the United States reflects this diversity (Min 1997; Stier 1991). As immigration continues to alter the demographic composition of U.S. ethnic groups, understanding diversity across immigrant cohorts is increasingly important for explaining women's overall employment patterns.

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Leading explanations for ethnic variation in women's labor force participation derive largely from research on men (e.g., Borjas 1994) and focus on differences in their human capital characteristics (e.g., education and English language), labor market factors (e.g., industrial restructuring and discrimination), cultural assimilation (e.g., nativity and duration of U.S. residency), and family structure (e.g., household size and income). However, the relative merit of these arguments for explaining differences both across and within ethnic groups has not faced empirical scrutiny, and recent case studies suggest that these explanations may be insufficient for understanding the experiences of immigrant women (Espirutu 2001; Gold 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Read 2004a). For example, Korean immigrant women have relatively high rates of labor force participation despite their low levels of English language ability (Min 1997), and Iranian and Arab immigrant women have high levels of educational attainment and low fertility rates but relatively low rates of employment (Dallalfar 1994; Read 2004b).

Given these atypical patterns and the growing ethnic heterogeneity in the United States, this study examines how well conventional explanations of female employment apply to 12 different ethnic groups of women, with a focus on differences by national origin and nativity. The analysis uses 2000 Census data to answer two related questions: 1.) to what extent do existing theories explain differences in employment within each ethnic group?; and 2.) to what degree do they explain differences from U.S.-born white women? In answering these questions, we expand prior studies in three ways. First, we assess the need for more complicated models of female labor force participation by comparing the relevance of existing theories both across and within groups. Our goal is not to dismiss prior theories, but rather to test their applicability across a range of ethnic groups, including newer, lesser-known populations and to assess how well theories derived from research on ethnic men's employment fit ethnic women. This will allow identification of areas where we can improve our current theoretical and methodological approaches to research on female employment. Second, we disaggregate the labor market participation of Hispanic and Asian women by country of origin and nativity, which allows for a more detailed understanding of differences within these two large and growing populations. Finally, we examine the labor force participation of Middle Eastern women, an emergent group that has received little attention in research on female employment and ethnic inequality (Bozorgmehr, Der-Martirosian and Sabagh 1996; Read 2004a, 2004b). Rather than propose new theories or explanations, which at this stage require intensive case studies with multiple methods (e.g., Read 2004a), we offer an overview of the applicability of common existing explanations to help motivate and focus future research.

Conventional Explanations for Female Employment

Female employment rates in the United States vary considerably by ethnicity. Among white and black women, for example, more than three-quarters of adults are in the labor force, compared with less than two-thirds of Hispanic women (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). There is also important variation by national origin. Among Asian women, for example, Filipinas are most likely to be

employed (84 percent), and rates as low as 65 percent are seen among Asian Indian women (Table 1). Nativity adds another layer of complexity, with foreign-born Filipinas having higher employment rates than U.S.-born Filipinas, with the pattern reversed for Chinese and Japanese women.

This complexity clearly poses challenges for existing explanations of women's employment. Are some determinants of employment universal while others are more group-specific? Evidence compiled for leading theories suggests this may be the case. The most popular and consistent theory is that human capital characteristics account for most variation in women's labor supply across ethnic groups (England et al. 2004; Kahn and Whittington 1996). Formal education has historically been a significant predictor of women's employment (Cohen and Bianchi 1999). In a recent comparison of white, black and Latina (Mexican, Cuban and Puerto Rican) women, for example, education accounted for a substantial portion of group differences in employment (England et al. 2004). Education also helps explain differences between immigrant and native-born women. However, empirical support for this claim is mixed and comparisons of immigrant and non-immigrant women are rare (Schoeni 1998). Common proxies for human capital may not capture systematic variation in the underlying qualities at issue (e.g., the nature of education received before immigration), resulting in returns to human capital measures that vary across ethnic and nativity groups.

A second leading explanation for differences in women's employment focuses on family conditions (Greenlees and Saenz 1999; Kahn and Whittington 1996; Tienda and Glass 1985). Children, especially young children, reduce women's labor force participation rates (Cohen and Bianchi 1999). Older children can have the opposite influence, improving women's work opportunities by assisting them with their domestic responsibilities. Household financial resources are also important, affecting the need for women's earnings (Stier and Tienda 1992). Family structure matters for immigrant women's economic activity because the presence of extended family members, which is more common among immigrants, may contribute domestic support, freeing women to participate in the labor force (Cohen 2002; Kahn and Whittington 1996). Here again, however, the social roles played by extended family members may vary across ethnic groups in ways that are not captured by simple household composition data (Casper and Cohen 2002), resulting in systematic differences in family effects on employment.

A third school of thought stresses the importance of local labor market conditions (Bean and Tienda 1987; Browne 2000; Greenlees and Saenz 1999). Some labor markets have higher concentrations of female-typed occupations, which contribute to higher women's employment rates (Cotter et al. 2000), but this structural effect has not been tested across ethnic groups. Research on immigrant populations highlights the importance of local ethnic enclaves for female employment (Greenlees and Saenz 1999), but again the literature here is somewhat mixed. Higher levels of ethnic concentration can allow immigrant women to work in environments where the use of their native language and previous work experience provide considerable opportunities for employment (Min 1997; Portes and Bach 1985). However, ethnic enclaves are often associated with a stronger presence of traditional culture, which can inhibit women's

employment (Read 2004a). Because this will depend on the nature of the enclave, these effects may vary across ethnic groups as well.

Finally, numerous studies underscore the importance of cultural assimilation for women's labor force activity (Hazuda et al. 1988; Read 2004a; Schoeni 1998; Yamanaka and McClelland 1994). According to this perspective, women with longer duration of U.S. residency have higher employment rates than more recent immigrant arrivals because they are more likely to possess the skills needed to navigate the labor market (e.g., English language proficiency) and have had greater exposure to U.S. cultural norms on gender equality, which promote women's public sphere activity. Newer immigrants, in contrast, typically maintain stronger ties to their countries of origin and/or live in ethnic enclaves where female domesticity is central to the reproduction of culture (Ebaugh and Chafetz 1999; Read 2003). An exception to this general pattern is the case of high-skilled immigrant workers, such as Filipina women. Capturing cultural assimilation in representative datasets is difficult, and most research has relied on nativity status and duration of U.S. residency as proxies. Clearly, however, these broad measures could affect women's employment differently across ethnic groups.

This review suggests that structural and cultural variation in the dynamics surrounding women's employment opportunities and decisions, as well as qualitative variation in the concepts measured, pose potential problems for the goal of a common set of explanations for women's employment. Evidence accumulated in research on newer immigrant groups supports this view, as we show next.

New Evidence on Immigrant Women's Employment

Recent case studies indicate that existing theories may be less generalizable than previously believed, or at least that common measures used to tap these theories are inadequate for capturing the experiences of some ethnic groups of women (Light and Gold 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Read 2004b). In the case of formal education, for example, U.S. Census data show that the positive relationship between schooling and employment holds only for some groups of women. Mexican women have low levels of education and correspondingly low rates of employment, and white and Filipina women have higher rates of both (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). But the story is quite different for Asian Indian, Arab, Iranian and Korean women, all of whom have much lower employment rates than would be expected given their high educational achievements. For example, Asian Indians have higher average education levels than Filipinas, but employment rates almost 20 percentage points lower.

Looking more closely at case studies of Middle Eastern immigrant women is instructive. Arab and Iranian immigrant women have educational attainments and English language proficiency levels that are second only to Filipina immigrant women and fertility rates that are equal to U.S.-born, non-Hispanic white women (Bozorgmehr et al. 1996; Read 2004a; Schoeni 1998). However, their employment rates are among the lowest of all immigrant groups, a finding that contradicts human capital and family models and cannot be attributed solely to labor market discrimination or family income (for a review see Read

2004a). Jewish immigrant women similarly exhibit favorable characteristics for employment, but their employment rates are also lower than conventional models would predict (Gold 1995; 2002).

In explaining these atypical patterns, scholars highlight diverse migration experiences of immigrant women relative to men (Espirutu 2001; Dallalfar 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Light and Gold 2000). Women not only differ in their opportunities to migrate, but also in their subsequent settlement in the United States. Many women immigrate as wives and mothers, others as refugees, and a smaller number immigrate as high-skilled workers. In each of these cases, cultural prescriptions for women's domestic and family responsibilities may mitigate the effects of conventional factors (e.g., education) on their employment decisions. For example, women's education may be encouraged as a cultural strategy to ensure that children receive proper socialization during their upbringing, rather than as a path to higher earnings (Bozorgmehr 1998; Hartman and Hartman 1996; Read 2004a). Within this cultural context, human capital explanations may be appropriate for estimating men's employment but may be insufficient for explaining ethnic variation in women's labor force participation – women may have high levels of educational attainment but remain out of the labor force to fulfill cultural obligations within the home.

While these and other studies are beginning to question the applicability of existing frameworks for understanding ethnic disparities in women's employment, no study to date has provided a systematic, comparative examination of the determinants of U.S. women's employment, by nativity, across ethnic populations. This study assesses the relative merit of conventional explanations of female labor force participation for 12 ethnic groups of U.S. women by nativity and immigration period. The analysis focuses on two related questions: 1.) to what extent do census-based measures of human capital, family structure and cultural assimilation affect women's employment differently by ethnicity and nativity? and 2.) to what extent do these factors explain employment differences by ethnicity and nativity from white women? In short, how well do conventional models fit different groups of U.S. women and how well do they explain differences between groups?

Data and Methods

Data for this study come from the 2000 U.S. Census 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). The sample consists of civilian women ages 18-64 who lived in metropolitan areas (and for whom the metro area of residence is identified), and who did not live in group quarters in 2000. The dependent outcome is coded as a dummy variable indicating whether each woman was employed at all in the previous year. Among the several possible indicators of women's employment, we use this because of problems that have been identified with the current employment variable in Census 2000, which produced very low estimates of current employment (Sayer, Cohen and Casper 2004). Members of most minority groups, immigrants, and people for whom English is not a first language were more likely to misreport their employment in the 2000 Census. Because this

may have resulted from a change in the wording of an employment question, we use information about employment in the previous calendar year, for which wording did not change.¹ In models predicting women's employment with this dichotomous indicator, we use logistic regression.

Our principal independent categorization, ethnicity, is complicated by several aspects of the 2000 Census data. Some identities are recorded as "races," including specific Asian and Pacific Islander nationalities, blacks and whites. Latino origin identities are recorded on a separate "Hispanic or Latino origin" question. Two other identities we code – Arab and Iranian – are available from the ancestry question or from the place of birth question, which were both open ended. Latinos, Arabs and Iranians in particular therefore have the opportunity to report conflicting racial-ethnic identities. Finally, some respondents took advantage of the new opportunity in the 2000 Census to identify multiple racial identities.

Our scheme codes each woman into one of 12 specific identity groups, in the following order: *Iranian*, based on the place of birth and ancestry questions; *Arab*, based on the place of birth and ancestry questions;² Latino (separated into *Mexican*, *Puerto Rican*, *Cuban*), based on the Latino origin question; Asian (separated into *Chinese*, *Japanese*, *Filipino*, *Indian*, *Korean* and *Vietnamese*) based on the race question; finally, the remaining respondents coded as *White* on the race question. For simplicity, the small number of women not coded into one of those categories was excluded from the analysis. We also exclude African Americans and American Indians because both of these groups have very low rates of immigration. For example, less than 10 percent of working age African-American women are foreign born, which more closely resembles the nativity composition of white women (5.5 percent are foreign born) than any of the other ethnic groups included in this study, each of which is at least 50 percent foreign born.³ Moreover, in the case of African Americans, the foreign born are more culturally distinct from the U.S. born than is the case for all the other ethnic groups, all of whom have more continuous migration streams connecting their ancestral homelands to those in the United States.

There are different methods of identifying Arab ethnicity using census data (Kulczycki and Lobo 2002). Separating the population into national origin subgroups is difficult due to sample size constraints; thus, most research uses the ancestry question and/or place of birth to identify people of Arab descent. We attempt to maximize the correct identification of women who see themselves as Arab by using both place of birth and ancestry. Among the 15,491 Arab women we identify in the sample, 32.1 percent were identified by both place of birth and ancestry, 17.1 percent were identified by place of birth but did not specify an Arab ancestry, and the largest group – 50.8 percent – offered Arab ancestry but not place of birth. Racially, 80.9 percent were coded as white only, an additional 11.8 percent were coded as white and "some other race," and 1.1 percent were "some other race" only, for a total of 93.8 percent who offer no racial identification that might contradict their classification as Arabs. Iranians (Persians) are analyzed separately because they do not share a language or cultural history with Arabs.

We include several measures to assess the effects of human capital, family structure, cultural assimilation and labor market factors on women's employment. For human capital we use dummy-variable indicators for educational attainment (high school graduate, some college, four-year degree, advanced degree), and a dummy variable indicating women who are currently attending school. We measure English ability with a dummy variable indicating those women who report *not* speaking English "very well" (a question only asked of people who report not speaking English at home).

The influence of family structure on employment is captured with a continuous variable for the number of the householder's own children in the household and a dummy variable indicating if any of those children are less than 6 years old. We account for marital status with one dummy variable indicating women who are currently married and another for those formerly married (separated, divorced or widowed). We also control for the natural logarithm of other income coming into the household (total household income less women's own income). As proxies for cultural assimilation, we use a series of dummy variables indicating women who are U.S.-born (the excluded category), and those who immigrated before 1970, from 1970 through 1979, from 1980 through 1989, and from 1990 through 2000.⁴

Finally, we control for several local area characteristics that serve as proxies for labor market conditions (Greenlees and Saenz 1999). We include women's employment rate as a proportion of men's employment rate, the local unemployment rate (defined as the share of adult labor force members who are not employed), and degree of ethnic concentration in each woman's home metropolitan area. This last variable equals the percent of the local area population that is own-ethnicity divided by the percent of all metropolitan area residents in the country who are of the woman's own ethnicity. For example, Arabs are .59 percent of all people who live in metropolitan areas, but 2.5 percent of the Detroit metropolitan area. So Arabs in the Detroit metropolitan area have a score of $(2.5 / .59 = 4.2)$. Individuals with higher scores on the ethnic concentration variable are living in local areas with more of their co-ethnics. Our final control variable is age, measured as a continuous variable.

The analysis proceeds through several steps. First, we present descriptive statistics and employment rates for 1999 for each group. Next, we assess the efficacy of our model for explaining the odds of employment for each group separately (with tests for differences in the effects from the white model). Finally, we test differences in employment odds between each group and U.S.-born white women, measuring the extent to which those differences are explained as variables representing the key theories are added to the models. The models are simple logistic regressions, and differences between coefficients are evaluated by the overlap of 95 percent confidence intervals for the estimates. We note that, because of the very large sample size, most coefficients, and differences between the coefficients, are estimated with a high degree of confidence. Rather than set an arbitrarily higher standard of statistical significance because of the large sample size, we report conventional tests of significance and focus our discussion on the direction and magnitude of the effects and differences.

Table 1: Means of Variables Used in the Analysis, 1999

	White	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Chinese	Japanese
<i>Employed in 1999</i>	.82	.65	.69	.74	.74	.75
<i>Nativity</i>						
U.S. Born	.95	.43	.48	.22	.16	.51
Immigrated 1990+	.02	.24	.12	.21	.34	.23
Immigrated 1980-89	.01	.17	.13	.16	.30	.09
Immigrated 1970-79	.01	.11	.09	.12	.15	.08
Immigrated prior 1970	.02	.05	.18	.29	.06	.08
<i>English not very well</i>	.02	.46	.29	.43	.52	.26
<i>Education</i>						
Less than high school	.09	.50	.32	.27	.18	.04
High school graduate	.27	.23	.27 ^{ns}	.22	.15	.17
Some college	.34	.21	.28	.29	.22	.35
College degree	.20	.05	.09	.14	.27	.32
Advanced degree	.10	.02	.04	.09	.18	.12
<i>Currently in school</i>	.11	.13	.13	.12	.19	.17
<i>Family</i>						
Own children	.73	1.38	1.04	.71	.72	.58
Any child under 6	.17	.34	.23	.17 ^{ns}	.18	.15
<i>Marital status</i>						
Married	.61	.54	.41	.56	.61 ^{ns}	.60 ^{ns}
Was married	.19	.20	.27	.26	.14	.14
<i>Other income (ln)</i>	8.96	9.30	7.83	9.07	9.39	8.98 ^{ns}
<i>Ethnic concentration</i>	1.06	3.03	3.00	20.31	2.64	10.24
<i>Women's employment</i>	.88	.83	.87	.86	.86	.86
<i>Unemployment rate</i>	.06	.07	.06	.07	.06	.06
<i>Age</i>	40.9	34.96	37.32	41.46	39.04	40.39
<i>N</i>	2,006,936	232,940	44,322	16,954	39,570	13,458

Results

A Profile of Working-age U.S. Women

Table 1 presents mean scores for all variables used in the analysis separately for each of the 12 ethnic groups. Except in the few cases noted, the means for each ethnic group are significantly different from those of white women. Filipinas and whites both had employment rates greater than 80 percent, with Cubans, Japanese, Chinese and Vietnamese women all having rates of more than 70 percent. Asian Indian, Mexican, Arab, Iranian and Korean women all had low employment rates of about two-thirds.

The primary question is to what extent do these differences reflect variations in women's human capital, family characteristics, degree of cultural assimilation and labor market factors? Looking first at human capital, Asian Indian women are the most likely to have a college or advanced degree (56 percent), and Chinese,

Table 1 (continued)

	Filipina	Asian Indian	Korean	Vietnamese	Iranian	Arab
<i>Employed in 1999</i>	.84	.65	.66	.73	.67	.67
<i>Nativity</i>						
U.S. Born	.17	.09	.10	.05	.10	.40
Immigrated 1990+	.27	.46	.29	.45	.24	.24
Immigrated 1980-89	.29	.26	.30	.29	.34	.16
Immigrated 1970-79	.20	.16	.26	.20	.28	.13
Immigrated prior 1970	.07	.03	.05	.01	.05	.07
<i>English not very well</i>	.22	.27	.56	.68	.37	.25
<i>Education</i>						
Less than high school	.10	.14	.13	.37	.10	.15
High school graduate	.15	.12	.24	.21	.19	.20
Some college	.31	.18	.26	.26	.28	.28
College degree	.38	.32	.29	.13	.27	.25
Advanced degree	.07	.24	.09	.04	.16	.12
<i>Currently in school</i>	.15	.16	.19	.20	.22	.15
<i>Family</i>						
Own children	.84	.89	.71	.94	.79	1.05
Any child under 6	.19	.26	.16 ^{ns}	.22	.18	.26
<i>Marital status</i>						
Married	.58	.72	.62	.55	.61 ^{ns}	.62 ^{ns}
Was married	.18	.10	.14	.16	.17	.16
<i>Other income (ln)</i>	9.76	9.97	8.95 ^{ns}	9.74	9.37	9.13
<i>Ethnic concentration</i>	3.53	1.62	1.85	2.11	2.87	1.42
<i>Women's employment</i>	.86	.87	.86	.86	.85	.87
<i>Unemployment rate</i>	.06	.06	.06	.06	.06	.06
<i>Age</i>	39.71	36.63	38.98	37.56	39.71	38.05
N	32,617	22,837	18,145	16,920	5,575	15,491

Notes: Source is 2000 Census, 5% PUMS. All means are significantly different from White means at $p < .05$ except where denoted by "ns."

Filipina, Japanese and Iranian women all have higher education rates much greater than those of white women. Mexican, Puerto Rican and Vietnamese women all have low rates of college completion.

Reflecting their refugee status, Vietnamese women are uniquely disadvantaged in terms of English language proficiency, with more than two-thirds reporting that they do not speak it "very well." Korean, Chinese and Cuban women also lag in English language ability, although to a lesser degree. English language proficiency is tied to the immigrant composition of these groups. The overwhelming majority of Vietnamese, Asian Indian and Korean women are foreign born (more than 90 percent of each group), as are three-quarters of Cuban women. Further, nearly half of Asian Indian and Vietnamese women immigrated to the United States during the 1990s. Among Middle Easterners, Arab women are more than four-

times as likely as Iranian women to have been born in the United States, as Arab immigration dates back to the turn of the century, while Iranian immigration peaked after the 1979 revolution.

Family characteristics tell a different story. Asian Indian women are the most likely to be married, to have children under 6 in the home, and have the greatest access to additional household income, all of which are expected to lower employment rates. Arab and Iranian women have a similar profile although Iranians are less likely than Arab women to have children in the home, especially young children. Japanese and Korean women are also unlikely to have young children in the home. Puerto Rican, Mexican and Vietnamese women have very different family conditions; they are the least likely to be married (especially Puerto Ricans), and much more likely than white women to have young children present in the household.

Among the local labor market measures, ethnic concentration varies most across these groups. White women are the most evenly distributed across labor markets. Their score of 1.06 indicates that the average white woman lives in a metro area with a composition nearly equal to their national representation. The most concentrated groups are Cubans and Japanese, many of whom live in densely ethnic labor markets (especially Miami and Honolulu, respectively). Mexican and Cuban women live in areas with the highest unemployment rates, with white women living in areas with the lowest rates.

This review of descriptive statistics shows that no group has a profile that matches perfectly their employment rates. For example, Asian Indian women have heavy family obligations and low employment rates, but also high education; Iranian women have high education and few children at home, but their low employment rates are more consistent with their high foreign-born composition. These figures also make clear the importance of disaggregating Asian, Hispanic and Middle Eastern groups by national origin, as their profiles and employment rates are not consistent with the pan-ethnic groupings used in most research.

Who Fits? Explaining Women's Employment

Table 2 presents separate logistic regression models examining how these factors affect women's employment, and how well all the variables together predict variation, within each group. We also test whether the effects of the variables are significantly different from those for white women (denoted by superscript "a"). The results suggest that the determinants of employment are similar across groups, but the various components of the standard explanations – human capital, family structure, acculturation and local conditions – have disparate impacts for the different ethnic groups.

Nativity and duration of U.S. residence are important determinants of women's employment for all groups and operate in the expected direction, with the most recent immigrant arrivals being considerably less likely to work than their U.S.-born or more established immigrant peers (c.f., England et al. 2004). Human capital also has the expected effects across the groups: educational attainment increases women's likelihood of employment and lack of English language proficiency decreases it. However, the effects are not uniform across groups.

Having a college degree has a much larger impact on white women's employment than on Korean or Chinese women's, while the effect for Puerto Rican women is significantly larger than that for whites.

Family factors also influence women's employment in a predicted fashion, but again, the magnitude of the effects varies considerably across ethnic groups. Marriage dampens employment, but it is much more restrictive for Asian Indian

Table 2: Logistic Regression Coefficients for Women's Employment in 1999

	White	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Chinese	Japanese
Intercept	-2.83***	-5.88***	-2.82***	1.37	-3.31***	-1.19
Nativity						
Immigrated 1990+	-.94***	-.69*** a	-.43*** a	-.28*** a	-.69*** a	-2.08*** a
Immigrated 1980-89	-.24***	-.20***	-.18***	-.03	-.04 a	-.63*** a
Immigrated 1970-79	-.01	.08*** a	-.13*** a	.06	.00	-.11
Immigrated prior 1970	.00	-.02	.03***	.06	-.22*** a	-.03
English not very well	-.07***	-.25*** a	-.39*** a	-.38*** a	-.31*** a	-.57*** a
Education						
High school graduate	.76***	.49*** a	.80***	.55*** a	-.01 a	.40*** a
Some college	1.17***	1.06*** a	1.41*** a	.95*** a	.13*** a	.80*** a
College degree	1.31***	1.26***	1.74*** a	1.04*** a	.26*** a	.96*** a
Advanced degree	1.83***	1.11*** a	2.21*** a	1.29*** a	.81*** a	1.51*** a
Currently in school	-.18***	-.19***	-.23***	-.10	-.64*** a	-.69*** a
Family						
Own children	-.27***	-.09*** a	-.11*** a	-.18*** a	-.21*** a	-.37*** a
Any child under 6	-.70***	-.36*** a	-.29*** a	-.36*** a	-.43*** a	-.61***
Marital status						
Married	-.20***	-.46*** a	.07*** a	.00 a	-.48*** a	-.29***
Was married	.19***	-.05*** a	.18***	.21*** a	-.31*** a	.49***
Other income (ln)	-.03***	-.01*** a	.01*** a	.00	.01	-.02***
Ethnic concentration	.03***	.01***	-.04*** a	.00* a	.01*	.01***
Women's Employment	3.77***	4.96*** a	2.78*** a	-1.62 a	1.68*** a	-.89 a
Unemployment rate	-4.28***	2.37*** a	-8.15*** a	-10.16***	-5.98***	-3.95*
Age	.11***	.17*** a	.11***	.11***	.23*** a	.19*** a
Age ²	.00	.00***	.00***	.00	.00*** a	.00***
-2 Log Likelihood	1,844,098	272,866	48,747	18,121	42,796	12,795
Percent Concordant	72.6	72.1	74.9	71.4	70.5	81.2
Generalized R ²	.11	.14	.17	.11	.11	.25

and Arab women than for white women. Mexican, Chinese, Korean and Iranian women's employment is also more sensitive to marital status than white women's. A different pattern emerges with respect to children and household income, where white women are much less likely to work if there are children present in the home (especially young children) and/or if they have access to additional

Table 2 (continued)

	Filipina	Asian Indian	Korean	Vietnamese	Iranian	Arab
<i>Intercept</i>	-3.16***	-6.42***	-2.46***	.95	-6.10***	-5.17***
<i>Nativity</i>						
Immigrated 1990+	-.33*** a	-.59*** a	-1.04***	-.39*** a	-.74***	-1.08*** a
Immigrated 1980-89	.22*** a	.08 a	-.16**	-.26***	-.08	-.55*** a
Immigrated 1970-79	.18*** a	.20 a	-.07	-.07	-.14	-.31*** a
Immigrated prior 1970	-.13*	.04	-.41*** a	-.41**	-.08	-.36*** a
<i>English not very well</i>	-.15***	-.37*** a	-.44*** a	-.11**	-.43*** a	-.47*** a
<i>Education</i>						
High school graduate	.39*** a	.27*** a	.43*** a	.31*** a	.52***	.40*** a
Some college	.86*** a	.65*** a	.58*** a	.82*** a	1.09***	.81*** a
College degree	1.20***	.47*** a	.44*** a	.98*** a	1.20***	.96*** a
Advanced degree	1.33*** a	.72*** a	.69*** a	1.06*** a	1.56***	1.52*** a
<i>Currently in school</i>	-.28	-.11**	-.61*** a	-.57*** a	-.34***	-.13**
<i>Family</i>						
Own children	-.07*** a	-.13*** a	-.20*** a	-.15*** a	-.22***	-.30***
Any child under 6	-.53*** a	-.43*** a	-.56*** a	-.41*** a	-.68***	-.62***
<i>Marital status</i>						
Married	-.19***	-.96*** a	-.57*** a	-.22***	-.55*** a	-.70*** a
Was married	-.06 a	-.59*** a	-.08	-.18*** a	-.31*** a	-.21*** a
<i>Other income (ln)</i>	-.04***	-.03***	.01**	.02*** a	-.04***	.00 a
<i>Ethnic concentration</i>	.01	.00	-.03*	-.14*** a	.06**	.02
<i>Women's Employment</i>	2.36**	3.17***	1.02	-2.45*** a	5.02***	3.74***
<i>Unemployment rate</i>	-.98 a	4.82*** a	-4.78**	-18.75*** a	-6.62**	.82 a
<i>Age</i>	.17*** a	.28*** a	.19*** a	.23*** a	.21*** a	.20*** a
<i>Age²</i>	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00

household income. Although, as we saw above, Asian Indian and Arab women are more likely to have young children and have greater access to additional income, their employment rates are less affected by these factors than are white women's. Most women benefit from living in areas with higher rates of female employment; the exception is Vietnamese women. Asian Indian and Mexican women are the only groups whose likelihood of employment increases in areas with higher unemployment rates, suggesting that they work in sectors less affected by market fluctuations (i.e., low-income or niche positions).

How well does this basic model differentiate between employed and non-employed women for each group? In Table 2 we report two common measures of predictive power for logistic models (see Allison 1999). The results show that the model is most effective for Japanese and Arab women, and least effective for other Asian women, with whites and Latinas falling in between. The differences are substantial, with the generalized-R² suggesting the model is three times more powerful among Japanese than Filipina women. The percent concordant reports the frequency with which the model correctly assigned higher odds of employment to the employed woman in every possible pair of employed and non-employed women, ranging from 81 percent among Japanese women to just 69 percent among Filipinas.⁵

The overall story in Table 2 is that standard explanations are useful for predicting women's employment, but their utility varies considerably across ethnic groups. This is apparent both in how the strength of the effects varies, and in how well the model overall predicts women's employment, across ethnic groups. We next consider how well these variables explain differences in employment between each ethnic group and white women.

Predicting employment odds for each group is an important test for these common theories and measures. However, recent research also has attempted to explain ethnic inequality in employment rates with the same approach (e.g., England et al. 2004). Therefore, we use the same set of variables to model the difference

-2 Log Likelihood	28,056	27,128	21,379	18,559	6,110	16,409
Percent Concordant	69.3	70.5	70.7	70.0	75.7	78.7
Generalized R ²	.07	.12	.12	.11	.18	.22

Notes: Source is 2000 Census 5% PUMS. Coefficients that are significantly different from White women's coefficient at p < .05 level are marked with "a."

*p < .10 **p < .05 ***p < .01

between each ethnic group's employment odds and those for U.S.-born white women. Reduced results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 presents separate models for each ethnic comparison (e.g., Mexicans and U.S.-born whites), with tests of the differences in employment odds from U.S.-born whites for U.S.-born and immigrant women of the 11 other ethnic groups. Except for Filipinas and U.S.-born Japanese women, we are trying to explain the *lower* employment rates of each ethnic group compared to white women. Column 1 shows logistic regression coefficients in the form of odds ratios predicting the likelihood of employment for each group relative to white women, controlling only for age and its square; we refer to this as the baseline model. Columns 2 and 3 show the percentage reduction in those employment gaps when human capital and family factors are added separately, and the full model shows the odds of employment when all things are considered together.⁶ The table permits us to examine the efficacy of human capital and family-based explanations for ethnic inequality in employment rates across ethnic and nativity groups, and also to see whether nativity effects persist when human capital, family and other factors are controlled. For example, the table shows that U.S.-born Mexican women have age-adjusted relative odds of employment 36 percent less than those of U.S.-born white women (odds ratio = .64). Adding variables for education and English ability reduces that difference by 59 percent, while adding the variables for family structure and income reduces it by 12 percent. When all the variables are added (including those not shown), the difference between U.S.-born Mexican women and U.S.-born whites is reduced to non-significance (odds ratio = 1.01). On the other hand, the employment gap for the most recent cohort of Mexican immigrants remains high even in the full model, with an odds ratio of just .51.

What is immediately apparent in Table 3 is that no explanation consistently accounts for ethnic inequality in women's employment. On balance, however, the human capital model performs best, reducing the observed employment inequality substantially, and across immigrant cohorts, for many groups. Of particular importance is that among every Hispanic national origin group in our sample, lower levels of human capital drive employment rates down relative to U.S.-born whites. That human capital pattern holds for Vietnamese and Korean women as well, but not other Asian national origin groups.

For several Asian and Middle Eastern groups, *returns* rather than access to human capital are more important. This can be seen in the finding that controlling for education and English language ability leads to *lower* employment relative to U.S.-born whites for these groups (U.S.-born Chinese, Japanese and Korean women; recent Japanese and Korean immigrants; U.S.-born and early-immigrant Filipinas, Arabs and Iranians; and Asian Indians). This is consistent with results from Table 2, which show significantly smaller effects of educational attainment for these groups.

For almost all groups, family characteristics are considerably less important than human capital for explaining employment differences from white women. Family effects also work differently for many of the Asian subgroups compared to Hispanic origin women. The inclusion of family characteristics widens rather than

Table 3: Logistic Regression Models Predicting Odds of Ethnic Women's Employment Relative to U.S.-born White Women

	Baseline Model Odds Ratio	% Change in Employment Gap		Full Model Odds Ratio
		Education And English	Family Structure and Income	
Mexican				
U.S.-born	.64	-59.4%	-11.7	1.01 ^{ns}
Immigrated 1990+	.17	-42.9	-15.2	.51
Immigrated 1980-89	.28	-61.2	-26.6	.99 ^{ns}
Immigrated 1970-79	.43	-93.8	-22.6	1.37
Immigrated prior 1970	.50	-91.8	-9.7	1.21
Puerto Rican				
U.S.-born	.57	-41.1	-0.8	.83
Immigrated 1990+	.30	-36.1	-3.9	.52
Immigrated 1980-89	.37	-46.4	-1.8	.67
Immigrated 1970-79	.38	-53.5	7.9	.68
Immigrated prior 1970	.40	-62.1	11.2	.76
Cuban				
U.S.-born	.88	37.4	12.2	.89
Immigrated 1990+	.42	-53.7	11.0	.65
Immigrated 1980-89	.56	-87.4 ^{ns}	6.5	1.00 ^{ns}
Immigrated 1970-79	.74	-121.3	-18.8	1.25
Immigrated prior 1970	.92	-250.8	-40.5 ^{ns}	1.29
Chinese				
U.S.-born	.89	157.9	93.0	.65
Immigrated 1990+	.35	-3.2	9.6	.32
Immigrated 1980-89	.72	-49.5	-17.5	.92
Immigrated 1970-79	.92	-145.9 ^{ns}	-23.5 ^{ns}	1.08
Immigrated prior 1970	.89	65.8	-58.8 ^{ns}	.87
Japanese				
U.S.-born	1.34	-57.5	-10.9	1.05
Immigrated 1990+	.11	4.0	11.4	.08
Immigrated 1980-89	.49	4.3	7.5	.47
Immigrated 1970-79	.85	-65.3 ^{ns}	38.8	.93
Immigrated prior 1970	.87	-80.2 ^{ns}	-34.6 ^{ns}	1.05
Filipina				
U.S.-born	.98 ^{ns}	189.1	302.0	.92
Immigrated 1990+	.75	-8.3	-32.0	.89
Immigrated 1980-89	1.48	1.2	33.0	1.85
Immigrated 1970-79	1.78	-3.7	11.8	1.99
Immigrated prior 1970	1.51	-28.8	25.3	1.55

reduces the employment gap with white women for all of the U.S.-born Asian women (except for Japanese women), suggesting that these groups have family structures that are more favorable for employment than white women's. The patterns are more variable for the immigrant cohorts, many of whom emigrated as wives and mothers and live in family situations that are less conducive to labor force participation.

Table 3 (continued)

Vietnamese				
U.S.-born	.58	.7%	22.4%	.58
Immigrated 1990+	.45	-65.3	-4.4	.85
Immigrated 1980-89	.57	-69.3	-19.4	1.04 ^{ns}
Immigrated 1970-79	.90	-230.6	-55.4 ^{ns}	1.34
Immigrated prior 1970	.74 ^{ns}	-72.7 ^{ns}	-6.7 ^{ns}	.97 ^{ns}
Korean				
U.S.-born	.66	-113.8	54.1	.47
Immigrated 1990+	.18	-101.9	7.7	.17
Immigrated 1980-89	.52	-105.1	1.5	.65
Immigrated 1970-79	.74	-112.3	14.2	.87
Immigrated prior 1970	.67	-118.2	-9.7	.77
Asian Indian				
U.S.-born	.57	33.2	44.1	.38
Immigrated 1990+	.22	9.3	-4.0	.20
Immigrated 1980-89	.54	-2.0	-27.8	.67
Immigrated 1970-79	.83	65.7	-28.0	.80
Immigrated prior 1970	.78	83.7	-39.7 ^{ns}	.71
Arab				
U.S.-born	.88	89.8	3.8	.79
Immigrated 1990+	.14	-7.5	-8.9	.20
Immigrated 1980-89	.28	-10.6	-17.7	.44
Immigrated 1970-79	.46	-21.9	-9.4	.65
Immigrated prior 1970	.62	-4.5	-7.5	.70
Iranian				
U.S.-born	.64	41.1	36.9	.48
Immigrated 1990+	.22	-4.4	3.1	.25
Immigrated 1980-89	.49	-3.3	.3	.55
Immigrated 1970-79	.62	26.4	-5.9	.60
Immigrated prior 1970	.71	37.6	-12.3	.70

Notes: The baseline model includes age and age-squared. Columns 1 and 4 show odds ratios and columns 2 and 3 show the percentage reduction in the coefficients from baseline when variables are added. All coefficients and percentages are significant at $p < .05$ except where denoted by "ns."

The patterns for duration of U.S. residence, a common proxy for cultural assimilation, are most consistent. For almost every group, the employment gap with white women is largest for the most recent arrivals and smallest for the most established immigrants. For Arab women, the nativity effect is most striking, with U.S.-born Arabs having employment odds that approach white women's rates, a finding that runs contrary to popular stereotypes about this population. But contrary to the common belief that immigrant women uniformly drive down the employment rates of their native-born counterparts, we find that in some cases the more established immigrant cohorts have rates that equal or outpace U.S.-

born women. The greater proportion of more recent immigrant arrivals for some groups drives down the overall rate of foreign-born women's employment and obscures this intra-group diversity.

The efficacy of the models for explaining ethnic inequality in employment is consistent with results on model fit presented in Table 2. Overall, there is little change in the odds of employment between the baseline and full models for most Asian subgroups and Iranians. This stands in stark contrast to the case for most Hispanic origin women, where nativity and human capital account for much of the employment gap.

Discussion

This study highlights the problem with any simple explanation of differences in U.S. women's employment rates. As we demonstrate, the utility of standard explanations varies by reference category (within or between groups), ethnic group membership, nativity status and immigration period. At the same time, we identify several patterns and themes that are useful for refining existing approaches to studying women's employment and for creating new frameworks that extend models of men's employment to better fit the reality of newer immigrant groups of women (c.f., Logan, Alba and Stults 2003).

First, we find that education is highly predictive of women's employment and more so than family structure; this finding is consonant with prior research and holds across ethnic groups. However, we also find that education is more useful for predicting whether or not women *within* a particular group work than for explaining why some groups of women work more or less than white women. The human capital argument (increase education, decrease inequality) derives from a rich literature on white-black-Latino/a disparities and seems to best fit the Hispanic-origin subgroups, but is less tailored for Asian and Middle Eastern women. Among U.S.-born Chinese and Filipina women, for example, employment gaps appear to result more from returns to education than from barriers to access. For other groups, education and English language have little to do with the employment gap with white women (e.g., Japanese and Arab immigrant women), implying that other factors are affecting their employment decisions or opportunities.

A more consistent pattern emerges across groups with respect to nativity and immigrant cohort, where the newest immigrant arrivals are least likely to work. Again, this appears to mirror prior studies that point to the immigrant composition of Latina subgroups to help explain why Hispanic women work less than white women. However, in extending this to Asian and Middle Eastern women – groups that have even greater proportions of immigrants than Hispanic populations – we find that not all immigrant women have lower employment rates than native-born women, and in many cases, the employment gap with white women is equal to or smaller for more established immigrants compared to their U.S.-born counterparts (e.g., Cuban, Chinese and Iranian women). With immigration increasingly altering the demographic composition of U.S. ethnic groups, identifying diversity across immigrant cohorts will become even more important for understanding differences in women's overall employment patterns.

In addition to differentiating women's employment by national origin and nativity, future research will need to distinguish between the experiences of immigrant cohorts and search for better conceptual and operational tools to account for observed differences.

The inability of existing models to explain variations in employment for many of the ethnic subgroups – especially more recent immigrants – raises the important question of where future research should look next. An avenue that seems especially promising is refining how we conceptualize and measure the influence of cultural assimilation on women's employment. Current measures, typically limited to nativity and occasionally duration of U.S. residency, inadequately capture how cultural norms on gender roles shape women's employment opportunities outside of the home. In part, this reflects the fact that current models of female employment derive from theories originally aimed at understanding men's employment patterns. While cultural gender norms are less important in the case of men (the male breadwinner role is nearly universal), they are clearly significant for women's employment, especially in non-Western, non-industrialized nations.

Thus, the question remains: Where do we begin to revise existing frameworks to capture these complexities? Qualitative studies suggest that looking more closely at the influence of marriage on immigrant women's employment may be rewarding (Ebaugh and Chafetz 1999; Foner 1997; Lim 1997). We find that marriage has virtually no effect on Cuban or Puerto Rican women's employment, but is especially restrictive for Asian Indian and Arab women, and to a lesser extent, Mexican and Chinese women. These effects are net of family wages, suggesting that something other than husband's income is discouraging employment. And for the most part, these are highly-educated women whose privileged status should make them more, not less, likely to be employed (England et al. 2004). Some recent work has suggested that having a spouse of the same ethnicity (homogamy) is an important mechanism for reproducing culturally normative gender expectations among immigrants (Ebaugh and Chafetz 1999; Read 2004a), thus it may be useful to revisit how we conceptualize the role of marriage for immigrant women's employment. Among groups with high levels of endogamy, it may very well be that marriage indicates the salience of in-group solidarity and captures cultural effects that are typically inestimable in most data sets used to study female employment. This hypothesis is testable, albeit crudely, with census data, but we have left that to a more focused study on immigrant women's employment.⁷

This study is not without limitations. Because we were interested in looking at multiple groups of women, we were unable to contextualize the unique experiences of each of the 12 ethnic groups, an unfortunate omission given the diversity that exists within these large populations. However, there are numerous in-depth case studies on these groups, and many of them provided the impetus for our primary objective of presenting a broader assessment of the applicability of existing frameworks across multiple ethnic groups of U.S. women. We also sought to supplement the more individualized case studies of lesser known populations, such as Arab, Iranian and Korean women, because they have historically been overlooked in national-level studies of U.S. female employment.

Overall, this study points to the diversity that characterizes today's groups of U.S. women and suggests that a "one size" approach does not fit all. Not only are U.S. women distinguished by different employment patterns, but they also are unique in the circumstances that influence their labor force participation. Factors that historically shaped women's employment are not necessarily the same as those that influence newer groups of immigrants. Future research must continue to search for more complete models of female labor force participation to fit the growing heterogeneity of U.S. ethnic groups.

Notes

1. For information, see "Comparing Employment, Income, and Poverty: Census 2000 and the Current Population Survey" by Sandra Lockett Clark, John Iceland, Thomas Palumbo, Kirby Posey and Mai Weismantle. Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2003; http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/laborfor/final2_b8_nov6.pdf.
2. Respondents born in Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Sauda Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan or Tunisia, or reporting first or second ancestry from one of those countries or North African, Transjordan, Palestinian, Gaza Strip, West Bank, South Yemen, Mideast, Arab or Arabic.
3. Japanese women are the exception with 48.7 percent being foreign born.
4. These 10-year intervals represent immigration cohorts for the past three decades and more accurately captures the concept of cultural assimilation than would a smaller number of categories (e.g., 15-year intervals).
5. There is no clear standard for reporting predictive power in logistic models (DeMaris 2002). However, our purpose here is more to identify the range of effectiveness – and see for which groups the model is more or less effective – than it is to measure predictive power to an exact standard. We are heartened by the similar results from the two measures reported here, which produce a rank-order correlation among these groups of .96.
6. We are aware of the methodological literature on explaining between-group inequality as a function of differences in means (described as compositional, characteristic or structural components) vs. differences in coefficients (seen as indicators of treatment, discrimination, or behavior) (e.g., Bianchi et al. 2000; Jones and Kelly 1984; Sayer, Casper and Cohen 2004). The simpler analytic strategy in Table 3 is suitable for our primary question of whether the various explanations for women's employment are universally applicable across ethnic groups.
7. We do not attempt to examine the effects of homogamy in this paper because we are focusing on both U.S.-born and immigrant women and rates of intermarriage are extremely high among the U.S. born. For example, Kulczycki and Lobo (2002) find that 80 percent of U.S.-born Arabs have non-Arab spouses.

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